



# Rurality, identity and morality in remote rural areas in northern Spain



Angel Paniagua

Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, CSIC, Madrid 28037, Spain

## A B S T R A C T

### Keywords:

Morality  
Identities  
Rurality  
Space  
Comparative microanalysis  
Spain

The aim of this work is to conduct a micro comparative study of the identities and moral discourses in remote rural areas. It is divided into two main parts: the first analyses the different approaches to rurality, rural others and moral approaches from a sociocultural perspective; the second corresponds to a comparative analysis of the spatial identities and moral discourses in remote rural areas affected by depopulation processes.

The empirical objective is to study, in two adjacent valleys, how rural micro identities arise and how the moral lives of individuals and social groups are configured. The qualitative methodology is based on an extensive stay in the area (casual and systematic observations and exchanges with local populations), and conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews.

The main results suggest that different group identities appear from a similar material base and, from these identities, a range of moral lives based on daily life. Materiality, identity and moral lives are three superimposed but distinct interacting layers.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Recently, rural geography has tended to focus more on the processes of rural repopulation and mobility of the population (Milbourne, 2007), than on the permanence of local populations in remote rural areas in decline. In this way, the dominant perspectives, regardless of their relevance, have focused on repopulation and counter-urbanisation (Connell and McManus, 2011; Stockdale and MacLeod, 2013) and have often been reflected as a binomial between rural losers and urban winners, who are included among the postmodern characters of rural studies (Hoggart et al., 1995; Schmied, 2005). This has resulted in rurality being viewed through counter-urbanisation, gentrification, lifestyle migration and rural place marketing, with emphasis on the opportunities of social change in the rural world (Stockdale, 2006). The analysis of rural areas in decline largely shares this study perspective, and has resulted in an adequate approach to the reality of this type of area (Spencer, 1995; Weekley, 1988).

The complex processes associated with rural areas in decline and their effects on the transformation, alteration or even the disappearance of communities has been the focus of geographical attention from a range of perspectives (Bosworth and Willet, 2011; Robinson, 2008). Among the processes considered from multiple

perspectives to condition the dynamics of declining rural communities, are those associated with a continuous population decline (Robinson, 1990; Carson et al., 2011). Similarly, their geographical consideration has also changed from positivist approaches, which place more emphasis on data, to cultural or even moral approaches.

Through these latest geographical tendencies, linked to a social and cultural construction of space, it is necessary to reformulate the phenomenon, usually from negative trends linked to population loss in a given space, often to the benefit of the urban world and a loss of the traditional way of life, to ones of a more positive and enriching character, concerning the generation of new cultural types and moral lives in spaces with a marked tradition of depopulation. In the context of social and cultural orientations of rural studies, there has been some emphasis on the multiple representations that can be made of a same space or rural place by different social groups and individuals (Halfacree, 1993, 2001), or by the specific representation of each rural place (Clope, 1996). This shows how different sociospatial relationships can be juxtaposed in each rural space, and each space would be the resulting product of these multiple influences, giving the space a fluid and dynamic character (Clope, 2006).

Proceeding in this approach, rurality can be deconstructed in different ways in each place, generating different micro identities, which would be ductile and malleable. Until now, relationships have been established between the rural space and the different

E-mail addresses: [angel.paniagua@cchs.csic.es](mailto:angel.paniagua@cchs.csic.es), [angel.paniagua@csic.es](mailto:angel.paniagua@csic.es).

uses, constructions and visions of each social group in the space, or the micro constructions of each rural place (Cloke et al., 1998). This has enabled advances to be made in other spaces and populations (Cloke and Little, 1997a,b). However, there are few studies in the rural geography setting that attempt to establish, in one materiality or structural space, different spatial micro constructions and (or in parallel) multiple social and moral discourses that respond to types or profiles, or to trajectories of individuals or social groups.

The aim of this study is to make a comparative analysis in different rural areas in decline, with similar spatial and material characteristics, of how processes of demographic, environmental and social change develop into new identities and rural representations, in which discourses of processes of positional and socio-environmental disadvantage are articulated. For this purpose, we have considered that, in each area, and generated by these processes and dynamics of rural change, diverse spatial (micro) identities emerge with different (or not) significance and contents and parallelly, moral discourses are constructed, which articulate and reflect the positions of the different social groups resulting from the processes of rural change. Hence, the coexistence of different (micro) visions of the place is acknowledged which, in turn, coexist with different moral discourses that reveal the different positions of social groups and individuals in relation to a place, reinforcing the significant (and acknowledged) complexity in the processes of cultural and social construction of the rural place. It is, therefore, possible to establish three dimensions or layers: structural spaces, spatial micro identities and moral discourses or trajectories that identify social groups or individuals.

## 2. Rurality, identity and morality in remote rural areas in decline

Advances in the sociocultural perspective of rural studies have enabled emphasis to be placed on the differences and on other places and people (Cloke et al., 1997), reflecting individual circumstances and ways of life. This has been accompanied by a more plural and complex view of rural areas, both from a spatial, and also a sociocultural perspective (Short, 1991). This has not only been related to the range of perspectives from which to comprehend rurality as a central axis of rural studies, but also to the recognition of differentiated lifestyles (Cloke et al., 1995; Cloke, 1997), both in relation to the city (Willians, 1973), and in rural areas (Murdoch et al., 2003). In this regard, Morris (2004) considers that there are two ways to analyse culture in rural geography studies: the first is associated with the trajectory and vital biography, and would be affected by personal beliefs and values; the second corresponds to a category that differentiates each social group. Within the context of this paper both types of analysis are valid. The first would be associated with different lifestyles that are embodied in discourses that compete against, or complement, each other in a complex and variable manner in remote rural areas (Pile, 1997). The second would be associated with a discourse that affects the entire community (or part of it) that exists permanently in a given area in a process of decline, daily conditioned by its reduced population. In other words, the former would be more closely associated with different lifestyles in the area (Valentine, 2008; Holloway and Hubbard, 2001), while the second would be determined by the distinction or differentiation of the community in relation to its more immediate, and also distant, sociocultural context (Shields, 1991).

As Castree proposed (2005), culture is a complex concept, based on a Geographical setting, on a transformation of the material world into a world of symbols that acquire different values and measures depending on the individuals or communities concerned. Consequently, culture or cultural processes mediate all, or almost

all, aspects of rural social life (Little, 1999). Hence, identities and discourses in the processes of elaboration, (re) articulation and contestation relating to a range of questions that affect and may or may not generate conflict in rural areas in a process of decline, should be considered from a fluid perspective. Here, they converge and it is necessary to determine daily issues and decisions which reflect the place of living (Whatmore, 2002), and the idealised concept of past lifestyles. From this perspective, the reinterpretation of new ruralities based on the process of decline takes on more relevance, such as forgotten or lost spaces, (re) constructed remote spaces, or new cyclic spaces that operate seasonally in remote rural areas in a process of decline. To a large extent, these areas are a clear point of reference for Geography, owing to their sociocultural type and their orientation towards moral tendencies (Cloke and Little, 1997a,b), and also to tackle the present debate about the performance of rural studies (Woods, 2010).

Owing to the recognised complexity and plurality of rural studies, on the one hand it is possible to investigate the micro and multiple social representations of a given place and, on the other hand, the appearance of multiple and varied social and moral discourses (Fig. 1) (Cloke, 2002; Cloke and Thrift, 1994) that emphasise the complex processes of social and cultural organisation in response to the processes of change and restructuring of rural spaces (Short, 1991). As Murdoch et al. (2003) show, the combination of economic, social and cultural elements has had the effect of generating multiple ruralities that compete among themselves, from both a functional and also a symbolic perspective. We consider that two major analytical strategies have arisen from this approach: one of them focused, from a spatial and sociocultural perspective, on the multiple representations of rurality of a given space (Halfacree, 1993; Holloway and Kneafsey, 2004). The other focuses more on the analysis of rural others, founded on spatial marginality and on some social groups, which are distant from the more idealised view of the countryside (Cloke and Little, 1997a,b).

The *first perspective* includes geographical tradition in the study of rurality and the debate of rural restructuring, and positions sociocultural studies among the processes of social change in rural areas, breaking away from a quantitative tradition (Cloke and Thrift, 1994). Hence, as professor Cloke proposes (2006), in Geography there is a link between rural studies and the cultural shift. If economic policy organises rurality, then from a cultural perspective rurality must be defined through different visions of identity, representation, difference and resistance (Cloke, 2006). The deconstruction of rurality through the discourses and their representations has been a very important line of study to establish

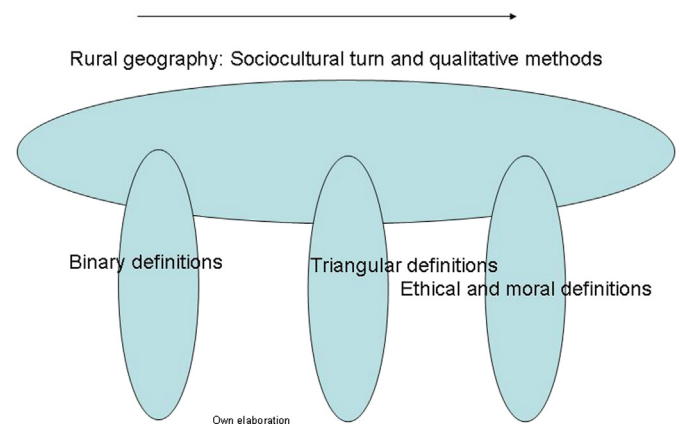


Fig. 1. More sophisticated ruralities.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/92484>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/92484>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)